

Afghanistan Grant 2022 Update

On August 15, 2021, the US began a major shift in their relationship to Afghanistan. They pulled out all of the military support that was in-country in a short and expedited manner, leaving behind thousands of individuals that had supported the US in a variety of ways. Many were on the path to a US permanent visa; dependents of US citizens, Doctors, Lawyers, interpreters, human rights proponents, secretaries, students, cooks.... Into this chaos and unknown stepped many courageous individuals and organizations, trying desperately to ferry individuals into more friendly countries. Many Non-profit organizations came into existence for the purpose of keeping the US promise to those individuals that had been loyal to the US for the last 20+ years.

Operation Snow Leopard and EVAC are two such organizations that came to the attention of Rotary-Grass Valley South. After hearing what each organization was proposing to do and actually were already laying the organization and structure in place to accomplish, our club decided that we would like to support these efforts and determined we would seek a District Grant from Rotary District 5190.

EVAC is an all-volunteer 501(c)3 that works to protect, evacuate, and resettle 350+ Afghans that are in hiding with the fear of imprisonment, torture and execution by the Taliban. The majority are families with young children. Not only are they unable to work because they are in hiding, but they are also faced with starvation, disease and instability associated with Afghanistan's collapsing economy and extreme food shortages. Many are Hazara, an ethnic minority that is facing genocide. Most of these individuals have immigration pathways to the US or other third countries and have hope for a better life if they can survive their current situation and leave Afghanistan.

Operation Snow Leopard is a 501(c)3 group of private citizens working to evacuate Afghan partners and their families, including: interpreters, women leaders, human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists, and other vulnerable minorities who have been stranded in Afghanistan after the collapse of the Islamic Republic August 15, 2021. These people are actively hunted by the Taliban because they stood with the U.S. and against everything the Taliban represents. To avoid capture, most spend no more than one night in a single location. Many live apart from their families to spare them the likely horror of seeing their loved ones executed or detained and never heard from again. The Taliban visit their homes almost daily, and relatives are often assaulted, tortured, and robbed for not disclosing their whereabouts. As fugitives in their own land, they cannot earn a living and only venture out in public in the most desperate situations.

We determined that although each organization had a slightly different target client and approach, they could both benefit from the dollars that we hoped to raise. It was agreed that the grant would support the Rotary Areas of Focus of Maternal and Child Health, Peace and Conflict Prevention / Resolution. An overview Powerpoint was created and shared with the other clubs in our area and a few other clubs in the District. All five clubs in Area 4 agreed to participate, as well as two other clubs in the 5190 District. There were also two community members that were significant financial supporters.

Lessons learned:

Never underestimate the power of personal stories. As we got to hear more about the work the two organizations were accomplishing and at the distribution of our grant, what our grant was able to accomplish, it was a bit overwhelming. The grant in total was \$25,823 and was split evenly between the two organizations. The funds were used to assist in visa and travel documents, food bundles, internet access; two babies were delivered, medical care was provided to at least two individuals who had been injured during detainment by the Taliban; Plane and transport manifests developed and assistance provided for transit to and maintenance while in other safe countries. In country couriers provided important information back to the two organizations that was used to streamline and secure processes used by individuals as they navigated to safety.

Be mindful and reply to any and all questions or concerns. We were fortunate to have Rotary International to consult with us during the grant writing process. About halfway through, a notice was received from OFAC to which a response was needed very quickly in order for the process to proceed. Afghanistan is on the US Treasury, Office of Foreign Asset Control ([OFAC](#)) list of countries for which added scrutiny is applied to possible monies going into the country. With the help of Rotary International, this unexpected hiccup was navigated and the grant-writing activity continued.

Think through what and how sustainment will look like. This was a unique project in the way we discussed sustainment and the actual disbursement of the grant funds. Each time individuals were delivered a secure food bundle, saw a physician, delivered a baby; or had any contact with the couriers, the individual or family and the couriers provided important feedback to subsequent couriers, so that other families would be informed about the environment, potential and real dangers and how to most securely navigate and return home safely. This was a very dynamic and dangerous climate, which, unfortunately, has only gotten worse.

Although we were unable to partner with a Rotary in Afghanistan or Pakistan, Rotary of Grass Valley-South is very grateful for the opportunity to serve others in this war-torn region.

A look ahead. The grant funds have been dispersed. Several dozens of individuals and families have made it to safety in neighboring Pakistan, and other friendly countries. Some have made it to their new home in the US and other countries. An individual began medical school. A few new babies have been born. Early this year, 2023, a route to Brazil opened for many. The environment for the local couriers and individuals assisting has become more and more dangerous. Ongoing volunteer needs include frequent communication via secure internet messaging with individual Afghans to assess and respond to daily life needs, maintain information flow, and share logistical information. The Rotary of Grass Valley South continues to receive periodic updates on the activities of the two organizations. They have set aside some of their budget to provide another round of financial support. On Jan 9, one of the directors from EVAC will be speaking via Zoom to the club. You are cordially welcome to attend. Contact Susan Drown, rotarygvs@gmail.com for the zoom link. In February, one of the directors from Operation Snow Leopard will be providing an update to the club. If you would like to attend or be present on zoom, please contact Susan and the link can be sent to you once a date is set. Grass Valley-South meets on Tuesdays 7-8AM at the Grass Valley Courtyard Suites 210 North Auburn St.